



South Carolina Department of
**CHILDREN'S
 ADVOCACY**
Advocacy. Accountability. Service.

MONTHLY UPDATE

Department of Children's Advocacy Monthly Update
Connecting with and updating our community

A Message from the State Child Advocate

The world can be a scary place, and life's obstacles and unknowns can feel overwhelming. The Department of Children's Advocacy (DCA) recognizes the need to gather and share resource information regarding the help that is available in South Carolina for children and families. In May 2021, DCA launched its online Resource Library with a goal of improving outcomes and wellbeing by increasing access and awareness to the services available through state agencies. We hope you will use and share DCA's comprehensive resource library to link people to reliable and relevant information about services provided by state agencies.

The Resource Library is available at our website or [here](#)

~Amanda F. Whittle, J.D., CWLS
 Director and State Child Advocate



IN THIS ISSUE

**GOVERNOR MCMASTER
 SIGNS EXTENSION OF
 FOSTER CARE INTO LAW**

**S.C. HEART GALLERY
 FEATURE: MEET CALIE**

**MENTAL HEALTH
 AWARENESS
 MONTH**



**AGENCY EMPLOYEE
 APPRECIATION
 CEREMONY**

**MEET THE NEWEST
 MEMBERS OF OUR TEAM**

**CONGRATS TO FORMER
 LEGAL EXTERNS**

**IN SYMPATHY FOR
 SANDRA BADEN,
 VOLUNTEER GUARDIAN
 AD LITEM**



S.C. Heart Gallery

Features South Carolina Children
Who Are Waiting on Their Forever Homes



Meet Calie

Calie was born in 2011 and is an adventurous and fun-loving child. She enjoys a variety of activities including riding bikes, writing and collecting pinecones. Calie hopes to become a fashion designer when she grows up and enjoys sharing her design ideas. Her favorite books are the “Dog Man” graphic novels and her favorite subject in school is math. Calie says that she can’t live without quiche and microwavable mac and cheese. Calie wants families to know that she is fun, helpful and friendly.

Photographer: L. Williams c. 2022
To learn more about Calie, click [here](#)



Do you have room in your heart and home for adoption?
visit www.scheartgallery.org

May is Mental Health Awareness Month



Your Mental Health Matters

Get tips and resources from NIMH to take care of your mental health.



NIMH

National Institute of Mental Health

www.nimh.nih.gov/mymentalhealth

Caring for Your Mental Health

Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, act, make choices, and relate to others.

- **Get regular exercise.** Just 30 minutes of walking every day can help boost your mood and improve your health. Small amounts of exercise add up, so don't be discouraged if you can't do 30 minutes at one time.
- **Eat healthy, regular meals and stay hydrated.** A balanced diet and plenty of water can improve your energy and focus throughout the day. Also, limit caffeinated beverages such as soft drinks or coffee.
- **Make sleep a priority.** Stick to a schedule, and make sure you're getting enough sleep. Blue light from devices and screens can make it harder to fall asleep, so reduce blue light exposure from your phone or computer before bedtime.
- **Try a relaxing activity.** Explore relaxation or wellness programs or apps, which may incorporate meditation, muscle relaxation, or breathing exercises. Schedule regular times for these and other healthy activities you enjoy such as journaling.
- **Set goals and priorities.** Decide what must get done now and what can wait. Learn to say "no" to new tasks if you start to feel like you're taking on too much. Try to be mindful of what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do.
- **Practice gratitude.** Remind yourself daily of things you are grateful for. Be specific. Write them down at night, or replay them in your mind.
- **Focus on positivity.** Identify and challenge your negative and unhelpful thoughts.
- **Stay connected.** Reach out to your friends or family members who can provide emotional support and practical help. Visit NIMH's site [here](http://www.nimh.nih.gov).

With Sympathy to the Family, Friends, and Community of*Ms. Sandra Baden***Sandra Baden****Volunteer Guardian ad Litem
Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program**

The Department of Children's Advocacy extends our deepest sympathy to the family, friends, and community upon the passing of Charleston GAL volunteer Sandra Baden.

Ms. Baden passed away on May 25, 2022 and was a volunteer with the Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program for 7 years. During her years as a Guardian ad Litem, Ms. Baden advocated for the best interests of 32 abused and neglected children in South Carolina. She had a passion for child advocacy and was not afraid to handle difficult situations in and out of court.

Ms. Baden was serving as a court-appointed special advocate for children in three court proceedings at the time of her passing. County staff often joked that Ms. Baden was in court more than they were. She attended the majority of trainings (in-person and online) and was always the "hit of the party" at volunteer appreciation events.

When asked why she was so committed to the GAL Program, she said that she had wonderful grandchildren, and she wanted all children to be as happy. Since retiring in 2015, she said she had more time to "pay it forward" to pursue that goal. The Charleston GAL staff shared, "Charleston GAL lost a loving volunteer this week. We will miss her wittiness and ability to quickly recognize issues regarding permanency for the children."


With deepest sympathy


Guardian ad Litem Program Welcomes New Team Members



Latika Tooten

Business Operations Manager
Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program

We welcome Latika Tooten as the Guardian ad Litem Program's new Business Operations Manager at the State Office. Latika is a graduate of Norfolk State University where she received a Bachelor of Science in Health Services Management.

Latika has experience as a Facilities Manager through which she was responsible for managing all contracts for building, vendor oversight, purchase orders, supply and inventory control and emergency management. Latika was also formerly a Director of Environmental Services where she oversaw a team of 22 employees, managed the department budget, developed and implemented strategies to improve efficiency and outcome, and inspected all living areas to ensure health and safety.

Latika is a mother of three adult children and two granddaughters and is excited about her new journey with the Guardian ad Litem Program where she looks forward to making a difference whenever she can.



Welcome



David McAlhaney

Region 4 Recruiter/Trainer
Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program

We welcome David McAlhaney as the Guardian ad Litem Program's Recruiter/Trainer for Region 4. David was previously employed with the S.C. Dept. of Corrections where he conducted rehabilitation and life skills classes and facilitated inmate programs in addition to other duties. He also worked at Charleston Southern University and with Dorchester School District 2.

David's past experience as a foster parent has helped to inform the need and importance of the Guardian ad Litem Program. David looks forward to getting to know all those who are making such a difference.

Governor Henry McMaster Signs Extension of Foster Care Bill into Law



Senator Katrina Shealy was a co-sponsor of the Senate version of the bill and is seen in this photo addressing the audience. Also shown are (L-R) State Child Advocate and Dept. of Children's Advocacy (DCA) Director Amanda Whittle, Representative Neal Collins who was a bill sponsor, DSS Director Mike Leach, Representative West Cox who was also a bill sponsor, Governor Henry McMaster, Lieutenant Governor Pamela Evette, Representative Russell Fry who was also a bill sponsor, young adult advocates who were formerly in foster care, Representative Raye Felder who was also a bill sponsor, and Senator Penry Gustafson.

On Wednesday, May 11, 2022, Governor Henry McMaster held a ceremonial bill signing for H. 3509 known as the Extension of Foster Care bill. "By providing additional resources to our youth aging out of foster care, we significantly increase their chance of success in adulthood and create a brighter future for all of South Carolina," said Governor Henry McMaster. "This legislation will greatly improve the outcomes of our foster care system, and I applaud Director Leach for his efforts in getting this legislation across the finish line."

DSS provided the following information: South Carolina is currently operating a state-run program funded with 100% state funds for youth aged 18-21 that have aged out of foster care. The Chafee/ETV program provides opportunities for young people transitioning into adulthood including funding services and support for youth. In the current state-funded program, SCDSS is serving 164 youth as of May 1, 2022 who have voluntarily signed themselves back into care. Services provided to these youths include assistance with housing, transportation, education/training, case management, and preparing these youth for the transition to adulthood. By adding this statute change into state law, South Carolina will be able to draw down federal Title IV-E dollars to help fund this program. Learn more about the new law [here](#).

Department of Children's Advocacy Recognizes Employees



Iseral Johnson (top) and Yvonne Lee (bottom) display the Department of Children's Advocacy polo shirts they received as Employee Appreciation gifts.

We thank all of our Department of Children's Advocacy (DCA) staff who advocate for improved outcomes for children in South Carolina. The following employees were recognized for reaching state service milestones during a virtual celebration on May 11, 2022:

30-year Recipient:

Cindy Dowdy - Guardian ad Litem Program

10-year Service Award Recipients:

Ivy Chestnut - Continuum of Care

Coretta Bush-Etheredge - Foster Care Review Division

Sharika Wallace - Guardian ad Litem Program

Latavial Williams - Foster Care Review Division

Five-Year Service Award Recipients:

Tena Andrews, Guardian ad Litem Program

Tina Bishop, Guardian ad Litem Program

Shawn Brown, Guardian ad Litem Program

Jennifer Burch, Guardian ad Litem Program

John Burgess, Guardian ad Litem Program

Kayla Capps, Deputy Child Advocate

Kathryn Clement, Guardian ad Litem Program

April Collins, Guardian ad Litem Program

Brittnie Cooper, Guardian ad Litem Program

Lisa Crawford, Guardian ad Litem Program

Jane Doolittle, Guardian ad Litem Program

Rhonda Durst, Continuum of Care

Kim Ellison, Guardian ad Litem Program

Karla Evans, Guardian ad Litem Program

Lavonna Fisher-Brown, Guardian ad Litem Program

Erica Fludd, Guardian ad Litem Program

Melissa Fowler, Investigations Unit

Christina Grant, Foster Care Review Division

Louvette Green, Guardian ad Litem Program

Jackie Hancock, Guardian ad Litem Program

Iseral Johnson, Guardian ad Litem Program

Stephanie Kitchens, Guardian ad Litem Program

Yvonne Lee, Continuum of Care

Joy Manning, Foster Care Review Division

Michelle Manning, Continuum of Care

Linda Maxie, Guardian ad Litem Program

Kristin McGill, Foster Care Review Division

Ashlee Patterson, Foster Care Review Division

Bailee Prather, Guardian ad Litem Program

Anna Roberts, Continuum of Care

Christy Vinson, Guardian ad Litem Program

Shannon Wilder, Guardian ad Litem Program

Barbara Woodbury, Guardian ad Litem Program

Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program: New Team Members



The Department of Children's Advocacy welcomes Sharisa Seabrook, Courtney Hicks, and Alanda Swinton to the Cass Elias McCarter Guardian ad Litem Program!



Sharisa Seabrook began working in Charleston as a Program Coordinator I/Case Manager on April 17th. Prior to coming to the Guardian ad Litem Program, Sharisa earned a Bachelor's degree in Human Services from Springfield College and worked in early childhood education. Sharika's goal is to "Get out into the community, help people and make a difference!" Sharisa resides in Ladson and is the mother of two amazing sons.



Courtney Hicks is the new Program Coordinator I for Horry County. She grew up in Greenwood, SC and graduated from Wofford College with a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology. Courtney has experience within the banking industry, as the marketing director for a local franchisee of a national restaurant chain, and as a volunteer recruiting specialist for a national non-profit organization. Courtney is most excited to become a strong advocate for the children within her community. When not working, Courtney enjoys spending time with her husband, two children (ages 11 & 12), and her golden retriever. They enjoy camping, traveling, cooking, and almost anything outdoors.



Alanda Swinton joined the Guardian ad Litem Program in Darlington County as a Victims of Crimes Act (VOCA) Program Coordinator I. Alanda attended Morris College and received a bachelor's degree in 2010 in Criminal Justice. Alanda has been doing casework for the past ten (10) years. She has experience working in therapeutic group homes and correctional treatment centers. Prior to coming to the Guardian ad Litem Program, she served as a DSS investigator. Alanda resides with her two children who are ages 14 and 3 and enjoys spending time with her family, art, and traveling.

Former Department of Children's Advocacy Externs Graduate from University of South Carolina School of Law



Deputy Child Advocate Kayla Capps and Brittany Roberts



Front left to right: Ambyr Goff; Haley Kiser; Brittany Roberts
Back: Deputy Child Advocate Kayla Capps & State Child Advocate Amanda Whittle



Deputy Child Advocate Kayla Capps was invited to present the University of South Carolina School of Law's Children's Law Concentration Distinguished Student Award to former legal extern, Brittany Roberts. Deputy Child Advocate Kayla Capps and State Child Advocate Amanda Whittle were grateful to be included as guests at the Children's Law Concentration Graduation breakfast with former legal externs Ambyr Goff, Haley Kiser and Brittany Roberts who graduated from the University of South Carolina School of Law with Children's Law Concentrations on May 5, 2022. We are grateful to the contributions of these externs who assisted with research, dashboards, and grant applications. To learn more about the Legal Extern Program, contact communications@childadvocate.sc.gov.

Congratulations, graduates!



S.C. Department of Children's Advocacy
1205 Pendleton Street, Suite 471
Columbia, SC 29201
www.childadvocate.sc.gov
803-734-3176